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Testimony of Congressman Roy Blunt Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation and Public Lands United States House of Representatives

H.R. 4481, Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Boundary Adjustment Act of 2004

1334 Longworth House Office Building
June 15, 2004
10:30 a.m.

Mr. Chairman, let me start by thanking you and the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing. I come before you today as the sponsor of H.R. 4481, the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield Boundary Adjustment Act of 2004. This bill, which has garnered the bi-partisan support of the entire Missouri delegation, will expand the park boundaries at the site of one of our nation's most significant Civil War battles.

On August 10, 1861, just twenty days after the first battle of Bull Run, Union and Confederate forces met just west of Springfield, Missouri on the banks of Wilson's Creek. The fight that ensued became the second major engagement of the Civil War and the first major battle west of the Mississippi River. The battle of Wilson's Creek also saw the death of the first Union general to die in action. Most importantly, however, the battle of Wilson's Creek dealt a decisive blow to the secessionist movement in Missouri and preserved Union control of the state.

When the National Park Service set aside 1,750 acres for the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield in 1960, not all of the land upon which the battle occurred was included. In fact, only about two-thirds of the battle site, currently falls within the park's boundaries. At the time, the land surrounding the park had changed little since the battle took place. Today, however, this land is becoming ever more attractive to developers. The southern portion of the park is located in the fastest growing county in Missouri, and pressure to further develop the area will only increase.

With this bill, we have the opportunity to protect an additional 615 acres of this important battle site by authorizing the National Park Service to acquire specific parcels of land surrounding Wilson's Creek through donation, purchase or exchange with willing landowners. With the acquisition of these parcels, the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield will contain 99% of the battle site.

The adoption of H.R. 4481 will allow the National Park Service to obtain one of the most valuable and distinctive Civil War collections ever assembled. General Sweeny's Museum of Civil War History, which is located on one of the parcels identified for acquisition, is a privately-owned collection of artifacts related to the Civil War in Missouri and Arkansas, whose owners have indicated their eagerness to sell. This collection currently houses approximately 15,000 pieces, including Civil War documents, photographs, letters and diaries. The National Park Service's Chief Curator, the Museum Curator at Gettysburg National Military Park and the Staff Curator at Harper's Ferry Center have all visited the Sweeny Museum. These experts have praised the unique nature of this collection and confirmed its vast historical significance. The acquisition of the Sweeny Museum, along with the John K. and Ruth Hulston Civil War Research Library, which was established in the park in 1985, will truly make Wilson's Creek National Battlefield an essential research spot for historians and others.

In a few moments, you will have the opportunity to hear from Dr. William Garrett Piston, whose unrivalled dedication to the study and preservation of Wilson's Creek has helped make this day possible. Dr. Piston will explain how this measure will add priceless new assets to the Wilson's Creek National Battlefield, preserve the battle site and allow future generations to experience the park just as their countrymen would have more than 140 years ago.

Mr. Chairman, let me thank you again for holding this hearing. I am proud to sponsor H.R. 4481 and support the preservation of this invaluable historic site. As a former history professor and a representative of the

entire Missouri delegation, I encourage the Subcommittee to support this bill and enable swift floor action.